



Family Liaison Office

Direct Communication Project

Resource No. 42

The Consular Associate Program & Basic Consular Course

THE CONSULAR ASSOCIATE PROGRAM:

Consular Associates are U.S. citizen Appointment Eligible Family Members (AEFMs) of U.S. government direct-hire employees overseas who, following successful completion of the required Basic Consular Course, are hired by the Consular Section at their post. During a three-year transition period, the role of a consular associate will evolve from performance of most officer-level functions to oversight of visa processing requirements. Associates will retain residual officer-level authority for use in emergent situations at post. While successful completion of the Basic Consular Course is an absolute prerequisite for any EFM who wishes to apply for a Consular Associate vacancy, it does not constitute the only hiring requirement and does not guarantee that the trained individual will actually be hired by the post.

In order to be eligible to compete for a Consular Associate position, an applicant must:

- 1) Be a U.S. citizen;
- 2) Be a family member included in the official orders of a direct-hire career USG employee who reports to the Chief of Mission and who has been paneled to an overseas post;
- 3) Possess a command of written and oral English sufficient to:
 - Read, understand and apply complex U.S. government laws and regulations,
 - Communicate clearly, appropriately and correctly in spoken English;
 - Draft clear, concise and grammatically correct cables and other correspondence in English regarding consular matters;
- 4) Have successfully completed the Basic Consular Course (PC-530) at the George P. Schultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC) in Arlington, VA.

THE BASIC CONSULAR COURSE:

The Foreign Service Institute's (FSI's) 31-day Basic Consular Course (PC-530) is an intensive training program which covers all aspects of consular work. The Course is principally designed to prepare Foreign Service Officers to serve as Vice Consuls at U.S. Embassies and Consulates. However, on a space available basis, FSI allows AEFMs to enroll in the course so that they may acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to perform Consular Associate duties overseas. AEFMs of State Department employees are not assessed tuition by FSI for the Basic Consular Course. AEFMs of non-State Department employees are usually able to receive a tuition waiver if the consul at the receiving post requests it and FSI concurs. (Any questions about possible tuition waivers for non-State AEFMs should be directed to the Family Liaison Office.)

The Basic Consular Course is divided into five units: U.S. Passport and Nationality, Immigrant Visas, Non-immigrant Visas, American Citizens Services, and Consular Management. The Course is of graduate-level difficulty, involving a substantial amount of highly technical reading. There are several hundred pages of study guides for each course unit, supplemented by readings in 7 FAM (2 volumes), 9 FAM (3 volumes and appendices), and the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

Each unit of the Course requires attendance at lectures, reviewing videotapes, participating in hands-on training in the use of consular automated systems, participating in role plays and preparing written "in-box exercises." In-box exercises are case studies in which written questions are posed regarding typical consular scenarios in the field. At the end of each of the first four segments, a multiple-choice exam is administered. Each of the first four segments of the course must be passed with an exam score of 80 percent or above in order to successfully complete the course and receive certification to perform consular work abroad.

The Course runs from 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. While most students find this time sufficient to complete their required course work, evening and/or weekend work on classroom assignments may be necessary. The NFATC facility is open in the evenings and on weekends for those who need additional time to complete their course work.

Note: While FSI also offers Consular Correspondence Courses to Consular Assistants and Consular FSNs overseas, these courses do not provide the same range and depth of instruction as the 31-day Basic Consular Course offered at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. As such, completion of one or more of the Consular Correspondence Courses does not, under any circumstances, qualify an Eligible Family Member to apply for a Consular Associate position.

THE CONSULAR COURSE ENROLLMENT PROCESS FOR AEFMs:

AEFMs who wish to explore the possibility of enrolling in the Basic Consular Course should contact Vanja Huth at the Family Liaison Office, Room 1239, Department of

State, Washington, DC 20520 (Tel: 202-647-1076). Please note that the Family Liaison Office serves as the gateway for all AEFMs who are interested in enrolling in the Basic Consular Course. FSI will not accept or approve any requests for AEFM admission in the Basic Consular Course which do not arrive from FLO; any enrollment requests which might be submitted directly to FSI, by individual AEFMs will be referred to FLO for action.

All AEFMs who contact FLO to request enrollment in the Basic Consular Course will be interviewed by telephone or in person to verify that they meet the first three of the four, above-listed eligibility criteria for Consular Associate employment. They will also be asked to complete an English/Reading/Self-Assessment Exercise based on regulations and readings of a level of difficulty similar to those of the Basic Consular Course. If an applicant meets the Consular Associate eligibility criteria listed above and scores at a level on the Reading Assessment which indicates that she/he has the ability to succeed in the Basic Consular Course, his/her name will be placed on FLO's waiting list for enrollment in the Course.

The Basic Consular Course commences every other week throughout the year with a maximum of 24 students in each class. Most enrollment spaces are assigned weeks in advance to junior Foreign Service Officers. Accordingly, only a few enrollment opportunities in the Course generally become available to AEFMs each month. As space in the Basic Consular Course is made available to FLO by FSI, candidates from FLO's waiting list will be assigned to sections of the course, taking into consideration their previously indicated dates of availability for study. FLO and FSI will always give course enrollment priority to applicants proceeding to posts with the greatest and/or most urgent need for trained Consular Associate candidates.

Upon being tentatively assigned to an upcoming section of the Course, prospective students will receive from FLO a form entitled, "*Agreement with the Family Liaison Office Regarding the Basic Consular Course (PC-530)*," which they will be asked to sign and return to FLO within five work days. This Agreement represents a formal acceptance by the applicant of the course dates offered to him or her and a commitment to attend and actively participate in the Course. Any registered applicant who fails to appear or cancels his/her enrollment within five days of the first day of class will be ineligible (for two years) to be nominated by FLO for future enrollment in the Basic Consular Course.

Course enrollment spaces allotted to AEFMs are never guaranteed. Due to unforeseen scheduling problems or unanticipated changes of orders for Foreign Service Officers assigned to the Basic Consular Course, it may sometimes be necessary to advance, push back or even cancel an AEFM's Course enrollment. While such changes occur infrequently, and will not happen once the AEFM's study has already commenced, all AEFMs registered to attend the Basic Consular Course on a future date must understand that their enrollment reservations are subject to change.

AEFMs who, following successful completion of the Basic Consular Course, are hired as Consular Associates at post will need to ensure that post's Human Resources Officer sends a cable to CA/EX (the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Executive Office) requesting a Consular Commission on their behalf. The Consular Commission formally authorizes the AEFM to perform all Consular Associate functions at his or her specific post.

AEFMs who are family members of Consular Officers must be alert to nepotism considerations when considering whether to enroll in the Basic Consular Course or apply for a Consular Associate position. No Department of State employee is allowed to supervise, or be supervised by, a member of his or her own family.